

Pepsi apologizes as it stops using controversial Kendall Jenner ad

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Model Kendall Jenner has makeup applied backstage before the Michael Kors Spring 2017 collection is modeled during Fashion Week, September 14, 2016, in New York City. AP Photo/Richard Drew

NEW YORK — Pepsi on Wednesday stopped running a commercial after it was widely mocked and criticized. The ad appeared to make light of protests for social justice causes.

"Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding," the company said. "Clearly we missed the mark, and we apologize."

It said it was "removing the content and halting any further rollout."

Reality TV Star Was Depicted As Protester

The ad shows Kendall Jenner, a model and member of the "Keeping Up With the Kardashians" reality TV family, stepping away from a modeling shoot to join a crowd of smiling, young protesters. The protesters cheer after Jenner hands a can of Pepsi to a police officer, who takes a sip.

PepsiCo Inc. had previously said the ad was created by its in-house team and that it would "be seen globally across TV and digital" platforms.

It initially described the spot as featuring "multiple lives, stories and emotional connections that show passion, joy, unbound and uninhibited moments. No matter the occasion, big or small, these are the moments that make us feel alive." That description was also ridiculed on social media.

Pepsi, based in Purchase, New York, had stood by the ad late Tuesday. However, by Wednesday, it was apologizing to Jenner for putting her "in this position."

Commercial Reminded Some Viewers Of An Actual Protest

Critics say the image of Jenner handing the officer a Pepsi was similar to a photo from a real-life event. It was something like a photo of Black Lives Matter protester Ieshia Evans approaching an officer at a demonstration in Baton Rouge, Louisiana last year. Black Lives Matter is an activist-led movement that protests against what they say are discriminatory practices toward black people in the criminal justice system.

Others criticized the protesters' signs in the ad for being comically innocent, with messages like "Join the Conversation" and heart and peace signs. The website Gothamist expressed a common sentiment online in calling the ad "gloriously tone-deaf." In other words, it was considered out of touch with people's concerns.

Among those mocking the ad was Bernice King, who tweeted a photo of her father, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., being confronted by a police officer at a protest march. "If only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi," the tweet said.

Company Unlikely To Be Significantly Affected

Larry Chiagouris, a professor of marketing at Pace University, said that the backlash was in part because Pepsi was a couple years "late to the party" with its message about unity. The timing made its ad seem as if it were trying to take advantage of the situation, he said.

Still, he also noted that the damage wouldn't necessarily be that serious. He said much of the negative sentiment expressed on social media is "easily washed away overnight."

It isn't the first time PepsiCo has backpedaled and apologized for an ad. In 2013, it pulled a Mountain Dew ad that was criticized for portraying racial stereotypes, or unfair generalizations, and appearing to make light of violence toward women. It pulled that ad from online channels and said it was never intended to run on TV.

Quiz

- 1 How does the section "Reality TV Star Was Depicted As Protester" develop a key concept of the article?
- (A) by explaining the timeline of Pepsi's support for the ad
 - (B) by describing the visual attractiveness of the ad
 - (C) by outlining the content and stated purpose of the ad
 - (D) by comparing different platforms for airing the ad

- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Commercial Reminded Some Viewers Of An Actual Protest."

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What does this paragraph accomplish?

- (A) It suggests that the ad was trying to take advantage of a real-life event.
 - (B) It demonstrates that the ad accurately mirrored real-life events.
 - (C) It explains how Jenner was affected by real-life events while filming.
 - (D) It illustrates the power of real-life events when captured in photos.
- 3 According to the article, which of the following people or groups have perspectives in AGREEMENT with each other?
- (A) Larry Chiagouris and Pepsi
 - (B) Larry Chiagouris and Bernice King
 - (C) the website Gothamist and Bernice King
 - (D) the website Gothamist and Pepsi

- 4 Which answer choice BEST explains the author's purpose in this article?
- (A) to share with readers the content and imagery of a Pepsi ad that they likely will never get to see
 - (B) to describe how reactions to the content of Pepsi's recent ad convinced the company to cancel it
 - (C) to provide readers with a call to action to boycott Pepsi products for using social issues to sell soda
 - (D) to explore ways that Pepsi can take steps to improve the concepts behind its ads in the future